

The Einsatzgruppen and the Holocaust

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The history of the Holocaust, within the larger context of the Second World War has the unusual and unique facility of periodically transforming itself, albeit in a manner which serves perceived Jewish collective interests. This is important because the Holocaust is unlike any other conflict, war, event, or cause in history in that it remains deeply rooted in the public consciousness. In an American context and very broadly summarized, it has taken the following forms:

Soon after 1945, the received version was that the Nazis had murdered around eleven million people - six million Jews, and about five million Poles. Others too were identified as victims, but those were the two most significant victim categories. It was said that these eleven million people were dispatched mainly by mass gassings. Such gassings occurred, as the story went in all the Nazi concentration camps. Auschwitz - actually a constellation of camps but collectively perceived as one large one - stood out as the main site of these gassings.

Within a couple of decades, the story shifted a bit. The salient feature of the gas chamber as the prime murder weapon remained, but it was now confined to 'eastern' camps as opposed to those of the 'west'. This is partly related to the Cold War period in which the Soviets and their minions controlled areas in which those eastern camps - being under Soviet control and continued occupation - were not open to inspection and research. Auschwitz - being in Poland - remained the main site and had by now become the centerpiece of the Holocaust legend in books, films, plays, and popular consciousness.

As time passed and with the loosening of travel restrictions and communistic rigidity, the former concentration camps evolved some tourist trappings. People could travel to them - both west *and* east, tour their museums, and be guided through their facilities, both original and in postwar mockup. They could ask questions and ponder the significance of their surroundings. A small but determined sub-category of visitor known as 'revisionist' also inspected some of these camps, particularly Auschwitz, and even took forensic samples of the original structures which supposedly served as gassing facilities. The resultantly published work of Fred Leuchter, Germar Rudolf, and others, demonstrated that the chemical residues analyzed from these facilities were not consistent with the official account. Or put another way, the alleged mass gassings almost certainly did not take place. In consequence, the process of historical revisionism dictated that the numbers be dramatically reduced. A wide variety of other objections, not just the chemical residues of Zyklon B, necessitated the change in number, but at least the change did occur.

The authorities maintaining the Auschwitz camp indeed ultimately responded by revising the numbers downward. Suddenly the four million murdered dropped to an official figure of a little over a million. This is where the overall Holocaust story underwent another major evolution. In this latest twist, the Six Million figure somehow was retained - relating to a sort of mystic symbolism that seemingly has to be retained at all costs - and a shifting of how the figure was arrived at occurred. Suddenly the 3 million Jews killed within that 6 million figure, perished 'in the east' with little explanation and no statistical backing. While the *Einsatzgruppen* or 'action groups' (or 'squads') has grown in its significance the typical estimate of victims of these groups are between 1.3 and 2.2 million. As the story continues to

shift and evolve it appears that the missing “victims” may yet be attributed to the *Einsatzgruppen* or even the German army.



German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, belied the accuracy of the Einsatzgruppen reports. Photo: 1938. Source: Deutsches Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archive), Bild 183-H01758. Wikimedia Commons: Bundesarchiv Commons.

Not a lot of detail was given at first, but the vague form of this newly revised Holocaust story was that these SS men herded Jews together at various locales and there shot them. Some were allegedly killed in 'gas vans' or via other means, but the majority were shot or machine-gunned. This is of great interest to revisionists. Hitherto revisionist researchers had focused their attention primarily on gas chambers, Zyklon B, cremation rates, open pit burnings, high water tables, coke deliveries, death records, and similar, chipping and gouging away at court sanctioned history. But the *Einsatzgruppen* idea was something relatively new. Only limited revisionist research has been done on this subject.

I would like to pose a number of questions which could serve as excellent starting points relevant to the revisionist process and then try to briefly respond to them. Firstly, what were the actual responsibilities of the *Einsatzgruppen*? Their main task was maintaining order and security within the rear areas of the German armies on the eastern front. This included the gathering of intelligence and especially the combating and repression of partisans. With this new twist in the Holocaust story, they were also somehow additionally tasked with the total extermination of Jews. Not just the Jews of all the areas they were responsible for - Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, the Crimea, areas of the

Caucasus, and occupied Russia - but also Jews from Germany and western Europe which were allegedly shipped off to them for liquidation.

Now let it be clearly known here that geographically we are talking about an enormous physical area not dissimilar to the size of the continental United States. How many personnel were engaged in this multiplicity of tasks? The *Einsatzgruppen* consisted of four main groups - A, B, C, and D - each comprising between 300 and 500 men. These 2,000 (generously estimated) men were allegedly entrusted with the enormity of these tasks. But how many were actually on duty at any given time, not engaged in intelligence gathering, anti-partisan activity, etc., and specifically engaged in killings? Bearing in mind support personnel - radiomen, supply and transport, administrative, men on leave, men sick, men back home on training courses, etc. - the 2,000 number shrinks. However, even if all 2,000 were active and available for action at all times, the main responsibility of the *Einsatzgruppen* was anti-partisan activity so how on earth did they get the time to find, marshal together, and kill millions of Jews?

At this point I must add into the equation the fact that other echelons of personnel assisted or worked with the *Einsatzgruppen*. These included Police battalions, 'Schuma' (*Schutzmannschaft*, i.e. self-defense) companies of Ukrainians, Latvians et al, even sometimes *Wehrmacht* security divisions or elements thereof. However, these forces were mostly used to cordon off areas and provide security for the alleged killing units, i.e. when they were not themselves engaged in anti-partisan actions which was their prime activity too. Still, the task is enormous, indeed very problematic, if not impossible.

What about transportation? The actual fighting armies at the front always had priority in receiving vehicles, fuel, and supply. Vehicles in particular were always hard to come by. What little was left for the *Einsatzgruppen* had to suffice for the transportation of these tiny bands of men to traverse huge distances to carry out their tasks. To get a handle on these problems, consider a comparative provided some years ago by revisionists: The LAPD has perhaps 10,000 officers, all plentifully supplied with modern, fast vehicles, and they have a single task to control crime and in one very small area, yet even they have great difficulty and much of the time crime is out of control. How on earth can 2,000 men accomplish this task and many and more important tasks in an area about the size of the USA and in which much of their transport is horse-drawn or nonexistent?

How many Jews were actually available to be killed, i.e. how many fell into the hands of the *Einsatzgruppen*? Revisionist researcher Dr. Walter Sanning in his path-breaking *The Dissolution of Eastern European Jewry* demonstrated that the six million figure was impossible, that literally millions of European Jews had escaped the Nazis through legal emigration and through evacuation eastwards with the Red Army as it retreated before the invading German forces. We may never know how many 'Eastern' Jews escaped this way but the numbers are generally agreed upon to figure in the millions. The Germans simply did not have anywhere near the numbers of Jews in their control that the official Holocaust story presumes.

What was the time frame of the killings? From June 1941 through summer 1944, about three years, in much of which whole regions were not in Nazi hands or had been lost. How many Jews could have been killed and how quickly? Rhodes in his *Masters of Death*, a study of the *Einsatzgruppen*, claims that these squads usually employed small groups of 4-8 men working in shifts with rifles or pistols and killing thousands or tens of thousands of Jews at a time. Interestingly, he estimates a grand total of about 1.5 million Jews killed by the *Einsatzgruppen*. Rhodes also suggests that the *Einsatzgruppen* were so overwhelmed psychologically from allegedly killing 1.5 million Jews that *SS-Reichsführer* Himmler

ultimately decided to shift responsibility for the extermination of the Jews, from squad killings to a more 'industrial' and efficient approach using gas chambers at Auschwitz and elsewhere. Rhodes is one of those court historians who, when it comes to the official version of the Holocaust, accepts all 'eyewitness' accounts, evinces no skepticism whatever, allows all possibilities, asks no inconvenient questions, and breaks no taboos.

Another author not up to speed with the numbers was French MacLean, whose *The Cruel Hunters* - the 'definitive' study of the famous SS *Dirlewanger* Brigade - an 'Einsatz' unit allegedly much involved in mass killings of Jews and often working closely with the *Einsatzgruppen*, estimates a killing total of about 1.3 million which he cites as a sort of consensus of historians on how many Jews were killed in the east. These numbers of course do not explain the missing millions from Auschwitz. MacLean incidentally makes clear that all these units were so overwhelmed with their responsibility for combating partisans that they had little time for anything else.

Oskar Dirlewanger's unit is worthy of close attention because it was well known to be enormously successful in its operations on the eastern front. At most times it had between 300 and 500 men, i.e. it was about the size of an *Einsatzgruppe*. Dirlewanger and his men won countless medals, decorations, citations, and all manner of bravery awards. They were victorious in nearly every operation and action, moved quickly, and were very highly motivated and disciplined. High ranking SS leaders and Himmler himself respected and feted them. Even Hitler watched their doings and wanted them given every possible assistance. Yet in spite of it all, they were credited with killing 'only' some 15,000 people during their years in action as an *Einsatz* unit. If the other *Einsatz* units were as successful, the numbers become relatively paltry when squared against claimed figures of 1.3 or 1.5 million, let alone 3 million.

Rhodes suggests that the SS were often drunk and disorderly and typically engaged in rape, looting, and indiscriminate murder. The author relied heavily on 'survivor' eyewitness accounts. MacLean demonstrates that such units actually were much more disciplined and severely punished men for even minor infractions. He even cites one instance where an SS soldier was denied leave for six months for his contracting a venereal disease after not using a condom whilst on R & R. MacLean mostly relies on SS efficiency reports and internal memoranda and documentation, none of which was intended for publication or general information. His work is important in that the *Dirlewanger* Brigade was thought to be fairly typical of the SS's eastern killing groups. He shows how it was structured and its limitations and varied, heavy responsibilities.

Of related interest is the issue of actual *Einsatzgruppen* after-action reports transmitted from the field to headquarters in Berlin. Many of these reports claimed whole regions to be 'cleansed' of Jews, i.e. which had become 'Judenfrei' (Jew-free) thanks to *Einsatzgruppen* actions. But a little known postwar trial, that of German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, belied the accuracy of said reports. The Soviets were angry at von Manstein because of his many victories over the Red Army during the war and wanted him executed. They tried to claim that huge numbers of Jews were murdered in the rear areas by *Einsatzgruppen* under his overall command and that he was thus responsible. However, his British lawyer R. T. Paget demonstrated that whole areas supposedly cleared of Jews contained many flourishing Jewish communities that were actually fully functional and untouched throughout the entire war. Clearly the reports in this one area at least, were false or at least greatly exaggerated. The court looked closely at this and accepted the unreliability factor of *Einsatzgruppen* reports and von Manstein was acquitted. This issue of false reports being filed could be explainable via certain speculations, but

more research is needed. Manstein himself did not reference the *Einsatzgruppen* or even Jews at all in his published memoirs.

The actual *Einsatzgruppen* reports were also radioed to the SSHA (SS main headquarters office) in Berlin. British intelligence, monitoring such transmissions and having broken the German codes, received the reports but did not make much use of them during the war. Why not? Surely such information, if as damning to Germany as one might assume, would be priceless in the propaganda war. This is another area worth further study.

Colin Heaton's masterly study of German anti-partisan operations in Europe makes clear that all rear-echelon units including SS, were overwhelmingly employed in anti-partisan duties. It is clear that even though the SS made a clear distinction between Jews as supporters of the Soviet regime, and ordinary Russians, Ukrainians, and others who were more often victims of that regime, anti-partisan warfare always had to take priority as rearward security was a prerequisite for any other type of operation.

Recent pseudo-historical documentaries make much of the *Einsatzgruppen* and pose astonishing claims about the *Einsatzgruppen*. An *Einsatzgruppen* officer named Paul Blobel, for example, was allegedly tasked to uncover and obliterate all remains and evidence of killed Jews. This allegedly entailed unearthing mass graves and immolating their contents, grinding bones into powder and carefully dispersing same throughout forests, re-covering the killing sites and planting trees over them, etc. And again, this over a huge geographical area and within a limited time span and with a small number of vehicles and men.

Frankly, claims such as these are not just unbelievable, but impossible. I have no doubt that the *Einsatzgruppen* did kill large numbers of Jews, at least partly in consequence of their anti-partisan actions, as many Jews were known to be partisans or supportive to them, and many others engaged in sabotage and espionage. Also a large number of Red Army commissars were Jews and Jews collectively were broadly known to be supporters or functionaries of the Soviet communist system. But Jews could not have been killed in the millions and probably not in many hundreds of thousands. One can only kill so many people with very limited resources over a certain time span in a huge area, and especially when one has vastly more important things to do. I do not doubt that many crimes occurred on both sides under the circumstances of a very brutal war that dragged into years and within the context of warfare being waged without the amelioration of Geneva Convention rules on land warfare, treatment of prisoners, etc. But clearly the numbers, even the possibilities, are outrageously improbable.

A sort of Orwellian process is at play in which 'historians,' unworthy of the title, write their books or give their talks in a way in which they try to stay in sync with the Holocaust story as it continues to evolve or in the way World War Two is portrayed. In a Judeocentric culture, this ensures publication and friendly review of their books, payment of speaking fees, and upward career progression. But sometimes they get behind the curve or are unaware of the latest gymnastic-like twists, turns, and double backward flip-flops that are effected to keep the symbolic figure of Six Million intact.

These 'historians' keep their inquiries limited to the pursuit of the standard story and do not take it into broader moral dimensions. For example, I would like to ask: how is it any different, ethically, morally, etc. for a small group of men to murder hundreds or thousands of people with machine-guns or rifles in a day or two of operations, from a day or two of operations in which a small group of men in bombers destroy neighborhoods, schools, homes, and businesses, of civilians who are about as defenseless? Is

one group vicious, sadistic, ideology-driven mass murderers, while the other, a 'band of brothers' fighting for freedom, justice, and other similarly ideologically-driven intangibles? Or are they about the same? Distinctions blur and blacks and whites become shades of gray.

Revisionism has a long way to go, especially in addressing the recent arrival of the so-called "Holocaust by bullets." Surely much of interest will be uncovered in this grand intellectual adventure still awaiting us.

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